

# Identification Notes for wildlife law enforcement

CATEGORY:

REPTILE

Scientific Name/s: *Geochelone denticulata*, and  
*Geochelone carbonaria*

Common Name/s: Yellow-footed tortoise and  
Red-footed tortoise, respectively

PROBLEM: Two superficially similar tortoises often imported together from Latin America. Both are CITES Appendix II, and difficult to tell apart.

*Geochelone denticulata*: carapace brown with yellow or orange **areolae**; head and large foreleg scales yellow or **orange**; outer edge of the carapace near the head is obviously serrated in juveniles; sides of carapace straight.

*Geochelone carbonaria*: carapace brown or **black** with yellow or red **areolae**; head and large foreleg scales yellow, **orange**, or red; outer edge of the carapace near the head is smooth; sides of carapace concave in most adults.

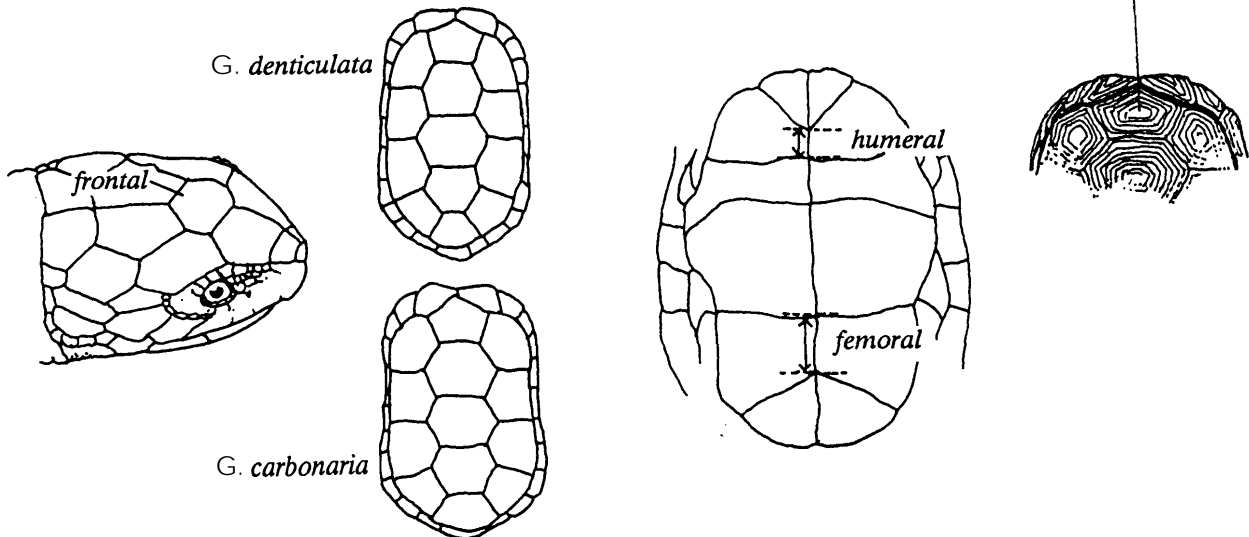
Many characteristics are the same for both species but scale patterns of the head and **interseam** lengths of the **plastron** will distinguish the two species.

head scalation  
after Ernst & Barbour, 1989

carapace shapes  
after CITES

plastron scutes  
after Zangerl, 1969

areolae



Frontal scale subdivided. Seam length between femoral **scutes** less than seam length between **humeral** **scutes**..... *G. denticulata*

Frontal scale not divided. Seam length between femoral **scutes** equal to or greater than seam length between **humeral** **scutes**..... *G. carbonaria*

Caution: scratches on the head maybe confused for scale divisions.

FROM: *G. denticulata* is commonly exported from Guyana, but it also occurs in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, French Guiana, Suriname, and Trinidad. *G. carbonaria* is commonly exported from Guyana, Barbados, and Grenada but also occurs in Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, French Guiana, Suriname, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and as an introduction to several Caribbean Islands.

## REFERENCES:

- Dollinger, P. (Ed.). 1984. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora, Identification Manual, Volume 3. Secretariat of the Convention, Lusanne, Switzerland.
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- Zangerl, R. 1969. The Turtle Shell. pp. 311-339 in: Gans, C., A. d'A Bellairs, & T.S. Parsons (Eds). Biology of the Reptilia, Vol.1. Academic Press, London & NY.